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ABSTRACT

It is argued in this address that public education, with its goal of widely distributed excellence, underlies basic American values. The classroom teacher is perceived as the central focus of the entire educational process, and ways of providing meaningful support to teachers are briefly suggested. New realities that the public and teachers must recognize are specified, and, in conclusion, views are stated about the educational roles and responsibilities of federal and state governments. (RH)

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Florida Governor Bob Graham's Remarks to the National Forum on Excellence in Education

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Indianapolis
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This year 1983 has been called the Year of Education -- the year America went back to the classroom.

Thanks to reports such as that of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the news media once again are back in the classroom.

Governors, commissioners of education, legislators, state and local governments are back in the classroom.

Presidential candidates are fighting their way back into the classroom.

For the first time since Sputnik, public education is at the top of America's national agenda.

In Florida, we are proud to be in the forefront of this surge of optimism about the public schools....

Proud to have tough new standards for high school graduation...

Proud to have enacted the first master-teacher plan...

Proud to have found the resources to make reforms reality.

And proud, most of all, because we believe that public education is the most successful of all the government's efforts to improve the lot of its citizens.

Much of government is intended to solve problems --

to punish offenders, to alleviate pain --

to remedy disasters.

Only in education do we systematically set out to prevent problems by shaping the future.

Our system of public schools is unlike any other institution anywhere in the world.

Our schools have socialized wave after wave of refugees and immigrants.

Our schools have integrated the races.

Our schools have equalized economic opportunity.

Our schools have provided the classic means for upward social mobility.

Thomas Jefferson said that given a choice between government without a free press and a free press without government, he would have no hesitation in choosing the latter.

But without free and uniform public schools, we will not long have either a free press, a free government or a free people.

For a free press requires universal literacy.

A free government requires informed citizen participation.

And free people require an appreciation of the choices before them if they are to help decide those choices.

Education -- public education with a goal of widely distributed excellence -- undergirds these basic values.

And in our system of public education, there is one role, one function, one person at the center of the process.

One person whose performance determines the performance of the entire system.

One caring, dedicated person who can change the world, one student at a time.

One lucky person with the most satisfying job in the world -- to illuminate minds, shape futures and build dreams.

That person is a teacher, the central focus of the entire educational process.

And I think that it is time for us to recognize our teachers for the good job our teachers do --- and to challenge them for the changing role they will play in the future.

Many people think a teacher's job is easy -- they get summers off, they only work until 3 p.m., and they don't really have to produce anything.

If you believe that, you need to go back to classroom.

When you consider what we give them to work with, and what we pay them, teachers produce miracles.

And I an proud that in my state, and all across our nation, education is becoming priority number one again.

And the number-one priority of every principal, every superintendent, every school board member should be to support good teachers.

To make that support meaningful, I propose the following short agenda:

1. Pay teachers more. We can't afford teachers who work cheap, because we can't afford to entrust our children to the care of teachers exhausted from working two or even three jobs to supplement a salary of $11,400 a year.

2. Show teachers we care about them in indirect ways. Today, if there's a piece of art in a school, it's probably in the principal's office. Our schools require more than a coat of paint, but bright colors and pleasant surroundings would represent change in too many of America's schools.

3. Give teachers upward mobility within their profession without abandoning what they do best. I submit that the highest-paid individual in a school system ought to be the best and most experienced teacher in that system.

4. Free principals from quelling fights, scheduling buses and ordering floor wax and get them back in the business of educational leadership. Every school needs an educational leader -- not a reluctant bureaucrat who couldn't get a decent raise and stay in the classroom. Teachers need inspiration and the principal is the person to provide it.

5. Make the teaching profession more professionally varied. A lawyer can move from private practice to government service to business and back --- and still be a lawyer. In education, we hang a label around someone's neck, called "primary teacher," or "professor of education", or "state department of education curriculum director," and never change labels for 35 years. Our retirement and certification systems punish the adventurous and reward the timid.

6. Finally, give teachers a sense of fellowship within their discipline. A chemistry teacher at Leon High School in Tallahassee should feel a sense of academic brotherhood or sisterhood with a chemistry professor at Florida State University across town, and with a research chemist at NASA headquarters.

The rest of us should step back in the classroom and say "Thank You" to our teachers more often -- and not just in words. We have to recognize new realities:

- Education no longer has a hammerlock on the career potential of women and blacks. Sometime in the 1970s, opportunities for women and blacks opened up. This shift has had at least as significant an impact as the break-up of AT&T, but only

now do we fully realize its message: to compete for the best, we have to pay better.

- Education no longer automatically attracts the best undergraduates. To attract the best, we must offer incentives -- scholarships, loans, assistantships.

- We have no time to wait for the conventional pipeline to meet our urgent needs. We must, as a nation, devise ways to insert skilled middle-aged people looking for second careers into our classrooms. They have talents we need; we must give them the skills to pass those talents on in the classroom.

- In Pensacola, where the U.S. Navy's training operations are based, there is a substantial pool of Navy men and women nearing military retirement.

  Those who indicate an interest in teaching as a second career -- especially those with expertise in science and mathematics -- are eligible for special training at the University of West Florida.

  And teacher training no longer is the exclusive domain of the Education colleges. To achieve the highest standards, we must demand more training in <u>what</u> they teach, not just how to <u>teach.</u>

Teachers, too, need to recognize some new realities.

- Teachers no longer can afford to be bystanders in the process of reform. To receive the rewards they deserve, teachers must participate in constructive change.

- Teachers must not emulate the other professions, which cower in conservatism when new ideas arise. Teachers must use their classroom creativity to share in the process of renewal, to raise standards at the profession's entry level and throughout the lifetime of every teacher.

- Teachers must capitalize on the willingness of America to invest resources <u>while</u> <u>that</u> <u>willingness</u> <u>exists.</u> We know all too well how fragile that public will can be.

- And teachers must recognize that public willingness to support education is tied to results in the classroom. Teachers must recognize that the rewards inherent in the movement toward higher standards depend on performance.

President Reagan, who will be with us tomorrow, deserves credit for focusing attention on education as an instrument of national policy.

He has reminded America that educational excellence is a vital link in our national defense, and in our ability to compete in the global economy.

But education is not a federal responsibility. Education is now and always has been a state responsibility.

The federal government should limit its activity in education to enforcing equality of opportunity, meeting special needs of the handicapped and disadvantaged, and providing loans for higher education. The U.S. Department of Education must be maintained to assure action on this national agenda.

If the federal government would assume its own true duty -- by paying the whole bill for income-maintenance programs -- the states could do a better job of education.

Today, the federal government does not bear the full burden of Aid to the Families of Dependent Children and Medicaid.

The federal government picks the pockets of the states as they struggle to pay the bill for schools.

But we cannot hide behind the federal government. Governors have a responsibility to play, too, and so do legislators.

The states must assume the primary responsibility for preparing America for the future by educating children today.

If governors make education a priority, a personal political priority, and invest their own personal political capital in better schools...

And if governors are prepared to be accountable for the performance of students, we'll have better schools.

If governors and legislators are prepared to send an urgent message to students, to parents, to business leaders and opinion leaders, we'll have better schools.

That message is simple: better schools need better paid teachers. And investing in better schools is an investment in America's future.

Our schools do not yet achieve the goal of distributing excellence as widely as we want --- but they are America's greatest success story.

No other nation on earth sets as high a goal --

An equal educational opportunity for all the children in the land.

And no other nation does as good a job of meeting so lofty a goal.

Let us join together <u>with</u> our teachers and recognize that our

public schools are what we have made them -- nothing more, and nothing less.

How we regard our schools has a powerful effect on what happens in our classrooms.

And classrooms, in the last analysis, are where our teachers help the American dream continue to grow.

This is an extraordinary forum here in Indianapolis. Assembled are governors, members of Congress, state Commissioners of Education, members of elected school boards, legislators.

But there is one title that is more honorable than all of those.

That title is the highest a civilized society can bestow -- not "president," nor "governor," nor "senator" --

But "teacher."

Thank you.

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